United Nations S/PV.6145

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6145th meeting

Thursday, 18 June 2009, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Davutoğlu	(Turkey)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Mexico	Mr. Puente
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Rice
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008) (S/2008/284)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

09-37304 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008) (S/2009/284)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. De Mistura to take a seat at the Council table.

Before proceeding with the item on the agenda, I would like to say a few words in my national capacity about the importance of this meeting from Turkey's point of view.

As we all know, Iraq has been on the Security Council's agenda for almost two decades now, and this Chamber has witnessed many significant milestones in the history of Iraq. For the past six years in particular, the Security Council has been an important forum, where the international community has reviewed and responded to various challenges facing the new Iraqi regime and, in fact, the entire United Nations membership for that matter. Indeed, this is where the road map to security and stability in Iraq was devised, and the commitment of the United Nations and of the international community to help Iraq along that path has been reconfirmed time and again.

That said, as Iraq has taken encouraging strides towards achieving the objectives set forth in numerous Security Council resolutions and assumed increasing ownership of its future, the discussions in the Council have, over time, become more concerned with stocktaking. That is a welcome development. In fact, we look forward to a time when Iraq will not be discussed as an issue of concern for the maintenance of international peace and security, but where Iraq itself will contribute to regional and global peace and security on its own. We feel that we are getting close to that point.

In the light of the foregoing, one may happily see today's meeting as a regular discussion on the situation in Iraq even though today Iraq is passing through a critical point in time, with various challenges still standing in the way of a stable and prosperous future. Iraq's assumption of security responsibilities from the Multinational Force MNF-I and the holding of national elections are two examples that immediately come to mind.

Thus, reaffirmation of the support of the United Nations and of the international community at this particular moment is critical. Indeed, we need to acknowledge the good work done by the Iraqi Government and express our readiness and willingness to stand with them in tackling the challenges that lie ahead. That is why we have seen these regular debates on the basis of the Secretary-General's quarterly reports as a golden opportunity to convey a strong message of support by the Council.

Being an able and strategic partner of Iraq, we felt that Turkey's presidency of the Council during this meeting makes it even more meaningful. At least, that is how we see the situation and that is why I have travelled to New York for the second time in less than 15 days in order to be present at this important discussion. I am looking forward to a lively exchange, where, hopefully, we will unequivocally confirm the terms of our commitment to the territorial integrity, unity and political sovereignty of Iraq, living at peace with itself and its neighbours.

Without further ado, I resume my functions as president of the Council and continue with the order of business.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2009/284, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Staffan de Mistura. On behalf of the Council, I would like to express our gratitude to Mr. De Mistura, who is today making his last appearance before the Council in his capacity as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

We appreciate Mr. De Mistura's capable leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and his unwavering approach to that challenging work since he assumed the post in September 2007. We wish him success in his upcoming work with the World Food Programme and in all his future endeavours. I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: You are quite right, Mr. President. It is an emotional moment for me, so please forgive me if I say a few more words than I would normally, in view of the fact that it is my last opportunity to address the Security Council in my current capacity as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

Eighteen months after starting my fourth assignment in Iraq and my sixteenth United Nations mission in the field, I am departing, somewhat proud of what that Mission has achieved in a short period of time and of our joint success with the Iraqis in overcoming what sometimes have appeared to be difficult challenges. Together we have helped to turn the page on how the Iraqis view the United Nations and the international community. Together, we have contributed to the evolution of Iraq, which can soon assume a new standing among the world community as an increasingly stable and sovereign nation.

Every so often the United Nations is given, if lucky, the chance and the right mandate, political support and resources to deliver. Every so often the timing, the team, the mission objective and the drive come together to make it work. I, for one, feel privileged to have been associated with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) during two of its most critical and formative years and to have seen remarkable and unforeseen shifts in the political and humanitarian landscape in Iraq.

Three dynamics have shaped the course of our action in Iraq during that period. First, I called for an expanded mandate with a stronger new resolution, which came from the members the Security Council.

Secondly, I called for an expanded presence, and it has been provided with the help of the Iraqi authorities and all Security Council members.

Thirdly, I called for a new approach, with a reinforced team as well as a clear directive from the Secretary-General to be proactive and results-oriented. That was the first message the Secretary-General gave me when I took up my assignment. The result is that we have been proactive in Iraq, particularly in view of the situation. Our approach has been matched by an Iraqi Government and a Prime Minister open to increased United Nations engagement, in consultation with the Iraqi authorities, and an international community that is changing its outlook towards Iraq and even letting the Organization assume, at some moments and in some areas, a centre-stage role.

More than ever before, the international community has been working towards common objectives in Iraq. That has made our lives and our work much easier. Resolution 1770 (2007) set parameters broad enough to give us considerable scope. One of the lessons we learned is that we need a very strong, broad resolution. The Secretary-General set the tone, giving us enough flexibility to act on the ground; the international community and the members Security Council in particular provided the support for an enlarged United Nations role; and the Iraqis set the agenda.

In seeking to combine strategic thinking and operational solutions, we chose, with the Council's blessing, time-sensitive entry points in areas that were gaining momentum. We could not do everything at the same time, in spite of the broad scope given us by the Security Council. We chose those areas in which the United Nations could make a difference, and not just a point, and be allowed to act as an honest broker whenever possible. We sought to be selective and

incremental in identifying quick wins to build our credibility, on behalf of the international community, by trying to demonstrate that we can deliver and by proving that we can be creative and reliable in the use of our main asset — international legitimacy.

UNAMI's strategic priorities were determined, first, by the need for immediate reaction to emergency situations, such as returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); and secondly, by anticipation of impending deadlines that, if not met, could potentially cause friction. A classic example was the referendum over Kirkuk and the debate of the timeliness of holding provincial elections. Our priorities also arose from the International Compact with Iraq, which has been led very actively and effectively by Ambassador Gambari, and from the regional dialogue, human rights and constitutional support issues.

Together, I believe, we have often turned challenges and crises into opportunities, thanks to the energy and stamina of the Iraqis. In an unusual combination for any integrated mission in such an operationally challenging environment, UNAMI has at the same time been acting in emergency mode, with its political arm working mainly on conflict prevention — on the Arab-Kurdish file, for instance — while the rest of the Mission was already working an post-conflict issues and peacebuilding.

The past two years have seen the Iraqis progressively fatigued by civil strife, slowly shedding sectarian divisions, seeking to reconcile after the horrible and terrible fallout from Samarra, bringing their differences into the legislative arena, and turning up in the polls to declare their preference for the country's return to normality. The Government and the Prime Minister have increasingly exercised their sovereignty, administering a State that enjoys broad support, as shown in the recent provincial elections. The Iraqi State is consistently building credible and independent institutions. The cabinet is functioning, Parliament is becoming increasingly reliable with a very active new Speaker, the Independent High Electoral Commission has gained experience in several elections and will conduct others in the future, and the Iraqi Security Forces are increasingly capable.

I need not remind the Permanent Representative of Iraq, who is an example to us all, that the Iraqi people have shown remarkable resilience. Iraqis are now more than ever able to determine the course of events in their own country, in spite of spikes of violent attacks against innocent civilians, which have recently been on the rise. These should be viewed as attempts by isolated elements or groups to produce a feeling of insecurity, but in my modest opinion they are not capable of destabilizing the country.

Now more than ever, Iraqis should be helped to focus on forging a political consensus. They are agreed that they should keep political dialogue open. The United Nations initiatives will continue to assist Iraq in securing those political advances and making sustainable security and socio-economic gains.

Our first initiative arose in the context of subsiding sectarian violence, when UNAMI acted promptly to prevent a new conflict between Arabs and Kurds, as will be recalled, and to contribute to national reconciliation by placing the highly controversial issue of a referendum in Kirkuk in the framework of a political process rather than as a hostile referendum. We proposed technical assistance in setting up the process, and a potential crisis over the impending expiration of the constitutional article was averted. But tensions have continued to exist between the two sides.

That is why UNAMI has kept the door of dialogue open and indicated possible options. It is indeed encouraging that the parties have now agreed to come to the table to commence discussions on a future process based on the elements provided by UNAMI's analyses of the disputed areas, set out in a 502-page document. A high-level task force, which was established as a follow-up and brought together Government and Kurdistan regional representatives, has been launched under United Nations auspices. I am glad to report that it met on 10 and 16 June. The time is ripe, and these beginnings of a high-level dialogue represent a critical step in the right direction. I believe that UNAMI will continue to contribute to that end.

As to the second initiative, 2009 has been a defining period as Iraq looks to possible future electoral events, a census and a series of referendums. Elections have been the flagship programme of the Mission. With the provincial elections in January 2009 — notable for their remarkable absence of violence and the credibility of the process — UNAMI has worked with Iraqis to produce four major electoral events since 2005, and will continue to do so in the upcoming elections.

The United Nations will continue to provide support for capacity-building in these areas. We shall

remain diligent in not forcing premature or ill-prepared events. There are three basic requirements for referendums and elections: appropriate and complete legal framework, sufficient funding, and an operational election commission with the capacity to conduct the event.

The third initiative was launched when the United Nations stood poised early to assist with the voluntary returns of refugees and IDPs, which remains a major priority for us. The exact number of internally displaced Iraqis is still not fully determined. Much is also speculated about returns ahead of parliamentary elections. To date, 70 per cent of all returns have come not from abroad, but from within the same governorate or from within Iraq. The hoped-for return of displaced populations will depend largely on improved quality of life, security and opportunities in Iraq. Security is only one of the many drivers of return in Iraq.

IDPs and refugees are mostly a political rather than a purely humanitarian challenge. As such, the problem cannot be solved by large-scale humanitarian funding directed purely to IDPs and refugees. Iraq is not in a humanitarian crisis, but has pockets of dire humanitarian need and displacement, which does not necessarily or automatically equate with vulnerability. There are many other vulnerable people in Iraq; that is why economic support is important. Funding for the displaced should therefore be packaged within broader programmes to revitalize jobs and services in conflict-affected communities. The United Nations, and in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will work to ensure that conditions are in place for voluntary, dignified and sustainable returns, but should also make special efforts on displacement-specific issues such as housing and related legal protections.

As to regional and international partnerships, in the context of its partnership and engagement with the international community Iraq would like to shed what it considers to be externally imposed obligations related to its future. A new approach is required in the regional environment.

While the ad hoc mechanism did not gain sufficient momentum, it had its own purpose for a period. After a while, however, it seems not to have gained enough momentum. We have witnessed constructive engagement and consistent improvement in bilateral relations with some of Iraq's neighbours, and that occurred in the context of the regional environment. A major shift has taken place in a very constructive way in the strategic partnership between Turkey, for instance, and Iraq, and other recent examples we see include Syria's resuming diplomatic relations and nominating an ambassador, as many others have done. Jordan has found new common ground on refugees and Iran has been indicating to us that it is ready to discuss cross-border issues with Iraq, including de-mining.

Additional facilitation is needed, however, to further increase understanding and trust between Iraq and its neighbours. I particularly wish to single out Iraq's relations with Kuwait. I firmly believe we are at a critical juncture, in this moment, to be able to contribute to a significant improvement of the climate of cooperation, taking into account the concerns of both countries. With respect to outstanding Chapter VII mandates, the Iraqi Government feels rightly that the time to turn the page is long overdue. Kuwait, for its part, also has rightful claims regarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Iraqi Government has shown positive signs of increasing cooperation by inviting, for instance, just in the past few days, a Kuwaiti delegation to Iraq to pursue the issue of missing Kuwaitis and by speeding up the deployment of an Iraqi ambassador to Kuwait. We, for our part, as UNAMI and as the Security Council, should now exert every effort in building on the current momentum. There are various creative options being floated that I hope will be discussed and elaborated upon by the Security Council in the near future in this regard.

What is next? The priorities are self-evident: delivery of basic services; dialogue between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Iraq, leading to a defusing of tensions in Kirkuk and other disputed areas; preparation for the next elections; pre-positioning to assist refugees and internally displaced persons, should they decide to return; the reintroduction of certain elements into the economy — for instance, helping the Awakening Councils, or Al-Sahwa Councils, to reintegrate themselves more totally into the economy; technical assistance to ensure that a census is conducted in compliance with international standards; tackling unemployment by revitalizing the private sector; providing expertise in ensuring the passage of a long-overdue hydrocarbon law as an essential step to increasing oil production

and revenue; and helping Iraq to rebuild its agriculture and diversify its heavily oil-dependent budget.

The key word, from the Iraqi point of view and from the United Nations point of view, is capacity-building. Iraq is rich in resources, in people and in water. They need and they are asking for capacity-building. Iraq, despite the fall of oil prices, is rich in human resources and natural wealth. The Iraqi people seek decent schools, hospitals and jobs, safe water and reliable electricity. Provincial elections were run and won on this platform, and this is likely again to be a driving factor in future elections. We need to help the Iraqi Government through capacity-building.

I am confident that, in its own national development strategy, Iraq will lay out a clear and inclusive vision for socio-economic revival. This step is urgent, not just to tackle recent suffering but also to undo the damage of nearly three decades of conflict and sanctions.

Capacity-building is also critical in the area of human rights and the rule of law. While reporting human rights violations is important, and we will continue to do so, the United Nations could contribute more and plans to do more by developing new mechanisms for human rights protection and supporting those already in place. We stand ready, for instance, to offer support to the establishment of a human rights commission. At the same time, we plan to provide more technical assistance projects aimed at monitoring prisons, courts and detention centres.

As we move into this next phase, international coordination will still be very important. I want therefore to take this opportunity to thank sincerely all the donors around this table and elsewhere who have contributed to the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, which closes its own contributions in one month.

UNAMI has, in Iraq, a team deeply dedicated to achieving a more present, visible and mobile United Nations, working alongside Iraq's Government. What we have achieved, we have achieved as a team, thanks to the support of the Secretary-General, the Iraqi Government and members of the Security Council. Here, allow me to thank my team in Iraq for their personal sacrifices, drive, resolve, integrity and exemplary commitment to work united under strenuous circumstances. They are united, a whole country team, with no separations, no differences and no competition. I thank in particular my two excellent deputies.

My personal respect goes out to our national staff, the Iraqi United Nations colleagues, who have seen many authorities come and go, have been the backbone of our presence over the years and have worked tirelessly to restore and rebuild Iraqi communities. At the same time, we constantly had the feeling that the international community in Iraq was not only behind us, but, as members have been proving and showing all the time, beside us in fact each step of the way, speaking in one voice and taking a united approach to the Iraqis' needs. That has been one of the strengths of the Mission.

I believe that we as a mission managed to build our credibility on, first, our presence. We now have many United Nations agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, UN-Habitat, the United Nations Office for Project Services, UNDP and the World Food Programme, present in Baghdad.

Secondly, our credibility is built on our access, our ability to talk to all sides, reach out to every community throughout Iraq and nurture relationships at the highest level of spiritual and political leadership.

Thirdly, we have our legitimacy, thanks to the Security Council. We have facilitated solutions that require mutual concessions by offering both credibility and international legitimacy.

Fourthly, we have our expertise, what expertise we have and when we can offer it, building up the capabilities of national institutions.

In conclusion, the future looks moderately bright, and there is growing hope for Iraq in the world and inside Iraq. If the Iraqis can avoid or defuse tensions — and they are doing so — and if they are capable of seeing changes in their daily lives through sustainable security gains, which are taking place, through the delivery of basic services and through more political inclusiveness — and we see movement in that direction — all of these being realistic goals, then Iraq will flourish.

This afternoon, a movie will be shown here in this building, a film dedicated to a friend and colleague of mine, Sergio Vieira de Mello. My colleagues in Iraq and myself feel that the presentation of this report coinciding with the fact that we will see this movie

today has a special relevance to us. I must say frankly that, when, a year or maybe more ago, in the middle of blistering heat, sandstorms, 20 rockets a day and, oftentimes, a lack of movement in the environment, we would ask ourselves "what on earth are we doing here?" What helped us to keep going and move forward was exactly that: seeing the resilience of our Iraqi friends going forward. We wanted to prove that all those who died in Iraq, for Iraq, including Sergio, the many others from many other countries and many Iraqis, did not die in vain.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing. I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month and thank you for coming back to New York to join us at this meeting. I would like to also present our thanks to your predecessor, His Excellency the Permanent Representative of Russia, for his distinguished efforts during his presidency in the month of May. Our high appreciation also goes to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, whom we are going to miss, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) team in Iraq and New York for their tireless work in assisting the Government and people of Iraq.

Having reviewed the reports of the Secretary-General on UNAMI's work in Iraq contained in documents S/2009/102 and S/2009/284, my delegation would like to make the following comments.

With regard to the political and security sectors, following the great success achieved by the Iraqi people in the provincial elections held on 31 January 2009, the political forces that gained the majority of seats in those elections have formed provincial councils in 14 of the provinces that held elections. That is an accomplishment that the Government of my country considers to be an important step within the framework of the plan to provide those councils with increased responsibilities and the power to play an important role in supporting the federal Government in the reconstruction of Iraq.

National reconciliation remains a top priority for my Government. In that context, last March, more than 4 million Iraqis visited the Holy Shrines in the city of Samarra, in an atmosphere characterized by a spirit of brotherhood and tolerance. There were no breaches of security during that event, which marked a day of national unity among Iraqis from different ethnic and sectarian groups, who overcame the painful past that had resulted from the bombing of the Holy Shrine in Samarra on 22 February 2006 and the subsequent acts of sectarian violence. The reconstruction of the Shrine symbolizes the process of rebuilding the national fabric of all components of Iraqi society.

Iraq today is a democratic State that respects freedoms and is governed by a Constitution. The principle of the peaceful rotation of power forms the basis of an open and transparent political process. All Iraqi political forces operate within that process and work through constructive dialogue to reach all important decisions, including on the key issues of building a federal system, legislation on the distribution of natural resources, constitutional amendments and internally disputed borders. That will lead to the reaching of a political settlement to resolve most outstanding issues in order to preserve the gains achieved within the framework of the political process.

The Iraqi people, driven by a belief in their mission to build a free and democratic Iraq, are building a democracy through mechanisms based on ballot boxes and not bullets. The Kurdistan region will hold council elections this July, while the central Government is preparing for the parliamentary elections to be held on 16 January 2010 to reinforce the political process and build State institutions.

The security situation in Iraq continues to improve, despite some security violations. Official statistics indicate that in the period between March and May 2009 there was a 76 per cent decline in the number of acts of violence as compared to the same period in 2008. That improvement attests to the development of the capability of Iraqi security forces and to the significant decline in the capabilities of terrorist groups. The latest figures indicate that Iraqi security forces have been able to dismantle and destroy 90 per cent of those groups. On 23 April 2009, the so-called Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi, was arrested.

The Iraqi Government, in cooperation with the United States Government, continues to take necessary measures to take over security responsibilities from American troops, in accordance with the security agreement signed between the two countries. Iraq is

already responsible for 90 of the 138 military sites. By the end of June 2009, the Iraqi Ministries of Defence and the Interior will be responsible for an additional 48 military sites.

The process of building Iraqi defence capabilities to fill the security vacuum created following the withdrawal of friendly forces continues successfully. It should be noted that Iraqi security forces have taken over security responsibilities for the province of Salahadin, which was the home province of former dictator Saddam Hussein.

The Council of Ministers has approved the agreement that was signed between Iraq and the United Kingdom to protect Iraqi oil platforms and provide training and support to Iraqi naval forces. We would like to thank friendly countries that are participating in the multinational forces and have, for the past six years, helped Iraq to maintain security and stability.

An essential element of the political process is to guarantee the Iraqi people's full enjoyment of their fundamental rights, as stipulated in the Iraqi Constitution. To that end, the Iraqi Parliament has decided to establish an Independent High Commission for Human Rights to monitor the human rights situation in Iraq and assist the Ministry of Human Rights to perform its core functions. The Iraqi Government also continues to modernize the Iraqi judicial system in order to harmonize it with the requirements of the new democratic order in Iraq.

The improved security situation in Iraq and the Government's systematic plan for the return of displaced Iraqis abroad has contributed to an increase in the number of Iraqis who have returned to the country. For example, recent statistics indicate a decrease in the number of Iraqis registered with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Syria, from 224,000 to 207,669. The Iraqi Government is launching a new programme to ensure the voluntary return of displaced Iraqis in Jordan and Egypt. It is also distributing 220 million Iraqi dinars to displaced Christian families in Hamdania as a form of temporary assistance until they can return to their home areas.

The Presidential Council ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance on 14 May 2009. On 11 May 2009, it also decided on Iraq's accession to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Lastly, on 19 March 2009, it passed legislation on compensation for people who have lost body parts owing to the criminal practices of the former regime.

In the social and economic sectors, the Iraqi Government is convinced of the importance of foreign investment in Iraq in helping to rebuild an open economic system. In that connection, under the direct sponsorship of the Prime Minister, the Government held a conference in London, England, on the theme "Invest in Iraq — 2009", in order to encourage foreign investment in the country. The conference was attended by about 400 investors and representatives of governmental bodies and private companies. The Government presented an investment plan consisting of about 500 strategic projects worth approximately $500 billion. Also at the conference, some 300 companies announced their intention to invest in Iraq. A similar conference will be held in Washington this October. Japan will also hold a conference in Baghdad on the subject of reconstruction in Iraq.

As part of the ongoing efforts by the Iraqi Government to rebuild Iraq, the Iraqi Council of Ministers approved a comprehensive plan to reconstruct service sectors and infrastructure. The estimated budgetary cost of that plan is about $65 billion. Under the plan, 38 per cent of the budget will be allocated to the housing sector, 27 per cent to the agricultural sector, 14.2 per cent to the transportation sector, 8.4 per cent to the water and sanitation sector, 8.5 per cent to the education sector, 5.7 per cent to the health sector and 0.9 per cent to the communications sector.

Within the framework of the joint efforts between Iraq and the international community, the Baghdad Coordination Group for the International Compact with Iraq held a meeting in Baghdad on 26 May, which included the participation of the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Iraq Compact, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, to discuss the latest developments and prepare for the next conference of the International Compact, which will hopefully take place in Baghdad later this year.

As a part of the Iraqi Government's efforts to resolve the ongoing issue of external debt, the Government recently reached an agreement to settle its debts with Tunisia and Greece, which amount to $186 million and $259 million, respectively. The Government has also settled its debt to trade creditors, which amounted to $470 million. In that regard, my Government has renewed its invitation to Arab countries to cancel the debt owed by Iraq and to settle

the debt issue as several sisterly and friendly countries have done based on relevant Security Council resolutions to assist Iraq, including paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 1483 (2003).

As a part of the Iraqi Government's efforts to support the most vulnerable social elements in Iraq, a conference on the orphans of Iraq was held on 15 April 2009 to launch a project for capacity-building, rehabilitation and coordination among organizations working with orphans in Iraq. The Iraqi Government and the World Health Organization have organized a working group on the role of the media in responding to the swine flu (H1N1) pandemic. A budget of approximately $30 million has been allocated to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

The Prime Minister has launched an initiative to protect the Iraqi heritage and antiquities and in this regard, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has recovered a large number of stolen antiquities.

On the regional and international levels and within the framework of regional and international openness, there have recently been several high-level visits to Iraq, which included His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Kuwait, on 26 February 2009; His Excellency Mr. David Miliband, British Foreign Secretary, on 26 February 2009; His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States, on 21 March 2009; His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gül, President of Turkey, on 23 March 2009; His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Naji Otri, Syrian Prime Minister, on 21 April 2009; Mrs. Hillary Clinton, United States Secretary of State, on 25 April 2009; Mr. Ali Afsn, Adviser of the President of Azerbaijan, on 20 May 2009; Mr. Murad Oozglic, Turkish Special Envoy to Iraq on 25 May 2009; Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the International Compact with Iraq, on 25 May 2009; and His Excellency Mr. Karel De Gucht, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, on 27 May 2009.

In return, the Iraqi President Mr. Jalal Talabani visited Ankara on 7 March 2009 and Tehran on 27 March 2009. The Prime Minister Mr. Nouri al-Maliki visited Moscow on 8 April 2009 to meet with his counterpart, His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Putin, and the United Kingdom on 29 April 2009 to meet with His Excellency Mr. Gordon Brown, British Prime Minister, and France on 5 May 2009 to meet with His Excellency Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of France and His Excellency Mr. François Fillon, Prime Minister of France.

The exchanges of visits led to the signing of several agreements on bilateral cooperation between Iraq and friendly countries, including a comprehensive economic and security agreement with Syria, a joint declaration of friendship and cooperation between Iraq and the United Kingdom, a Convention on Economic and Technical Cooperation between Iraq and the United Kingdom and a visit by a Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Rafi Al-Issani to New York, where he met United States and United Nations officials to talk about a friendly relationship, economic and trade relations and reviewed Security Council resolutions at the United Nations.

In a recent development, Egypt has nominated His Excellency Ambassador Sherif Kamal Shahin as Extraordinary Ambassador to Iraq in Baghdad. The Iraqi Government's efforts to build bridges with friendly countries stems from the sincere wish of the Government and people of Iraq to establish relations with all nations of the world in order to build communication and contribute to the return of Iraq to its natural place in the international community.

The Iraqi Government has begun consultations with the Secretary-General to review Security Council resolutions on Iraq pursuant to Security Council resolution 1859 (2008). Based on our review of those resolutions, we have determined that Iraq has fulfilled all its obligations under those resolutions, with regard to both the impact of the occupation of Kuwait and issues related to arms.

I would like to point out a number of obligations that Iraq has fulfilled with regard to Security Council resolutions on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait. Iraq has recognized the State of Kuwait and its borders in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and both States continue to cooperate in the maintenance of border markers. Iraq has returned the remains of 236 missing Kuwaitis found in Iraq. Since 2003, Iraq has handed over to Kuwait numerous items belonging to that country and most recently the Kuwaiti authorities have received 4,539 audio and video tapes belonging to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. Next week, the Iraqi Government will hand over to the Kuwaiti authorities 24 boxes

containing old currency and stamps. As of April 2009, Iraq has paid $27.1 billion of the total compensation due for the invasion of Kuwait. However, $25.5 billon remains due and that is a heavy burden on Iraq, which needs the money for services, reconstruction and development.

As for the area of disarmament, Security Council resolution 1762 (2007), which ended the mandate of United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), stated that Iraq had fulfilled all its commitments with regard to disarmament. Moreover, the letter of the United States and the United Kingdom annexed to that resolution and addressed to the President of the Security Council, dated 22 and 27 June 2007, indicated the complete destruction of Iraq's special programmes to produce weapons of mass destruction.

We hope that the Secretary-General and the Security Council will assist Iraq in returning to the international status it held before the invasion of Kuwait in 1990; an invasion which was one of the most atrocious crimes committed by Saddam Hussein and for which the Iraqi people continue to pay a heavy price.

In conclusion, I would like to stress my Government's gratitude for UNAMI's role in Iraq and for Mr. Staffan de Mistura's support offered at the Government's request and based on mutually agreed mechanisms. With the imminent completion of his responsibilities in Iraq, I wish him all success in his future endeavours, both personal and professional.

The President: I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make a statement.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all I would like to welcome the President and to thank him for his presence and for chairing the meeting today. I also thank Mr. De Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and a very old friend, for his briefing to the Council. I take the opportunity to welcome his courageous and effective action with his entire team and his commitment to implement the mandate given to him by the Security Council. I thank him for — as he stated — contributing to giving hope to the population of Iraq. At every step of the way he has been a worthy successor of Sergio Vieira de Mello and I thank Mr. De Mistura for mentioning his name today. We think of him, as we think of all of those who lost their lives with him in Baghdad. Finally and on a more personal note, I can only say how much I and the Council wish him great success in his next mission in the city he loves. The international community still needs him, and the Council still needs him. For all that he has done, I give him my personal thanks.

The briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was very complete. We support its analyses and share its conclusions. I will raise only three points. Today, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) plays an essential role in several areas: first in the area of elections, it has acted effectively in supporting the Independent High Electoral Commission to ensure the smooth operation of elections, which is the best sign of democratic life in Iraq. After the successful holding of the governorate council elections on 31 January last, we support the actions of the mission to organize the parliamentary and regional elections in Kurdistan on 25 July and the elections for the Council of Representatives planned for January 2010. Under its mandate and the recommendations made by the Secretary-General, the Mission must also continue to provide its expertise to the Iraqi Government so as to make progress on the question of disputed internal borders, especially in the Kirkuk area. We welcome the analytical reports given to Iraqi federal authorities and to the regional Kurdistan Government in order to promote an agreement among the political actors within Iraq on this critical issue. It is a difficult problem, but it must be resolved. We call on all Iraqis involved to display courage in working toward a solution acceptable to all.

My second point, Mr. President, is to emphasize that in the last few months in Iraq we have seen substantial progress in establishing a safe, stable, democratic, unified and prosperous country, where human rights and the rule of law are increasingly respected. France congratulates the Government of Iraq on its efforts in this area, efforts that the Permanent Representative of Iraq has just confirmed. We thank the Permanent Representative for his contribution, which emphasizes his readiness to work toward the stability and prosperity of his country. Regardless, from now on, as was emphasized by the Special Representative, we must take advantage of this momentum in order to achieve new progress in improving both the living conditions of the people of Iraq and the national reconciliation process. Besides the question of Kirkuk,

this will require the completion of the constitutional review process, as well as tangible improvement in everyday life.

My third and final point, Mr. President, beyond the primary responsibility of the Government of Iraq and the important role played by the Mission, is that we believe that neighbouring States must participate fully in this effort. So it is in this spirit that we support the action of the Mission to strengthen a regional dialogue. We would hope especially that the regional dialogue conducted by Iraq with its neighbours will allow it to tackle essential issues such as border control and the conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return for refugees, for which the progress alluded to just now by the Special Representative is an encouraging first sign. It is in the interest of States in the region to get involved in making Iraq permanently stable. That is why we wish to welcome the Minister today to the Security Council. The fact that he is chairing this debate and the agreement that he has managed to reach the presidential statement of the Council is a sign of the positive and constructive role that can be played by a country as important as Turkey. I will conclude by emphasizing how important it is that the current positive cycle be able to allow Iraq to fully recover its sovereignty. Here we would note resolution 1859 (2008), in which we asked the Secretary-General to prepare a report in consultation with Iraq on the action necessary to allow them international status equal to what they had before resolution 661 (1990). We await this report and are ready to act on that basis and in the framework of Iraq's international obligations, in particular resolutions 773 (1992) and 833 (1993) on the question of the borders with Kuwait, together with all States concerned. And, as was indicated by President Sarkozy in Baghdad last February, Iraq can count on the friendship of France to work with it on Iraq's full reintegration into the international community.

Mr. Parham (United Kingdom): It is an honour to have you chairing this meeting today, Mr. President, and we also welcome the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to the Council. I would like to express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on developments in Iraq over the reporting period and underline our strong support for the vital role of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in helping Iraq's development as a democratic, inclusive and stable State. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. De Mistura in what will be his final appearance before the Security Council in his role as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq. He will be greatly missed. His leadership and dedicated hard work have been central to achieving the progress we have seen in Iraq over the past 18 months. He's done an excellent job, and the depth of his commitment was inspiringly clear in his very moving final remarks just now. I wish him well in his next posting. In order to maintain this positive momentum that he has created, it's going to be imperative to ensure a smooth and timely handover to his successor.

Mr. President, the Secretary-General's report illustrates that, despite the security challenges, Iraq continues to make good progress. We welcome the election of a new Speaker of Parliament. This will now enable the Council of Representatives to push forward with discussion of key legislation vital to the future stability of the country. We also welcome the formulation of new provincial councils, which follows the successful provincial elections in January of this year. They have an important role to play in delivering the essential services critical to improving the lives of the Iraqis who voted for them. And we look forward to the upcoming parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan region next month and the national elections that will take place early next year. We urge the Government of Iraq to ensure that the Independent High Electoral Commission has sufficient funding to facilitate successful national elections. As a further sign of support, the European Union has again offered to send independent election observers to both of those elections.

On the issue of human rights, we acknowledge the good progress that Iraq has made, but agree with the Secretary-General's report that more remains to be done. We strongly urge the Government of Iraq to ensure that the Independent High Commission for Human Rights receives adequate funding in the forthcoming supplementary budget. Mr. President, we agree with the Secretary-General that fostering dialogue between all parties on national reconciliation remains a key priority for Iraq, and welcome the positive role played by UNAMI in this area. We encourage all parties to work together in the spirit of compromise, to make further progress on federalism, resolving disputed internal boundaries and sharing natural resources. The international community has

made clear that it stands ready to offer its full support for this process, including by facilitating talks between the parties. Recent political tensions in Mosul and Diyala are a cause for concern. We hope the talks will soon begin to reduce these.

We'd also like to express our deepest sympathies to the Iraqi Parliament and the Iraqi people following the murder last week of Member of Parliament Hareth Al-Ubaidi. This was a cowardly act and should not be allowed to disrupt the political process in which Iraq's leaders are engaged. We're confident the Iraqi people will continue along the path of democracy and dialogue in order to overcome violence and sectarianism.

Mr. President, we welcome Mr. De Mistura's efforts to improve regional dialogue and cooperation between Iraq and her neighbours. This is a key requirement for the development of lasting regional peace and security. We agree with the Secretary-General's report that the International Compact for Iraq would benefit from a more streamlined approach, focused on key socio-economic priorities. To this end, we encourage greater coordination between the International Compact and international donors such as the World Bank and the European Union, to ensure that all assistance provided is complementary and well targeted. We look forward to the Secretary-General's report on Security Council resolutions relating to Iraq.

Mr. President, I'd like to close with a few words about the future direction of the United Kingdom's relationship with Iraq. This week, our Prime Minister reiterated once again to our Parliament that the core of the new relationship we're building with the Iraqi people will be based on diplomatic trading and cultural links. And Ambassador Al Bayati mentioned just now the joint declaration and convention we concluded recently with Iraq to that effect. We'll continue to play a supportive role in the reconstruction of Iraq. As a further sign of the normalization in Iraq, and improved security, United Kingdom combat troops have begun to draw down. This process will be completed on schedule by the end of July. Meanwhile, we stand ready to help build the capacity of the Iraqi armed forces, and, as Ambassador Al Bayati mentioned, his Council of Ministers has approved an agreement for the United Kingdom to help with the protection of Iraqi oil platforms and provision of training and support to Iraqi naval forces.

The United Kingdom believes a secure, prosperous and democratic Iraq, at peace with its neighbours and taking its rightful place in the international community, remains extremely important to the strategic and domestic interests of many countries, in the Middle East and beyond.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): We are honoured by the Minister's presence here today at this important debate.

I want to begin by joining my colleagues in thanking you, Mr. Special Representative, for your extraordinary leadership. I know how deeply my Government, up to and including President Obama, has been grateful for your service, your enormous contributions, your personal sacrifice and your success in this important endeavour. You will be missed. I just wish to underscore how deep our gratitude truly is. I also want to thank you for reminding us of the enormous contributions and sacrifices that so many have made on behalf of the United Nations, as well as many other countries, foremost the people of Iraq, towards the achievement of a sovereign, democratic and stable Iraq. Your mention of Sergio today is moving and timely, and we thank you again for that.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report and all the men and women of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for their tireless work to support a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

Rooted in our shared strategic interests with the Government of Iraq, heartened by the heroic service of thousands of brave Americans and many others, and mindful of the future of millions of Iraqis, the United States remains deeply committed to Iraq. As this Council knows, the United States plans, in accordance with the United States-Iraq security agreement, to withdraw its combat troops from Iraq's cities, towns and villages no later than the end of this month. That in turn will pave the way for the withdrawal of all United States forces by the end of 2011. Our drawdown and withdrawal, however, in no way diminish our long-term partnership with Iraq. During this transition period, the United States will continue our firm support for the Iraqi people as they assume full responsibility for their sovereign nation. We will continue to build a strong, lasting, strategic relationship with Iraq, one that respects the sovereignty and serves the interests of both our countries.

As a friend and as a strategic partner, we will work with Iraq's Government to strengthen democratic institutions, uphold the rule of law and develop peaceful and cooperative relations with its neighbours. We will also continue to encourage the international community to deepen its engagement with the Government of Iraq to further secure and build upon Iraq's political, economic and security gains.

The United States would like to acknowledge the vitally important work that the United Nations is doing in Iraq. Under the leadership of Special Representative De Mistura and at the invitation of the Iraqi Government, UNAMI continues to expand the United Nations presence and capacity throughout Iraq. From helping to address disputed internal boundaries to helping hold free and fair elections, from pursuing national reconciliation to easing the suffering of refugees and the displaced, UNAMI continues to play a critical role in promoting the long-term peace, security and prosperity of Iraq.

In the days and months ahead, UNAMI's work will be critically important. Allow me to highlight just three areas where its efforts will matter most.

In January, Iraqis chose new provincial councils in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces. That vote was marked by a heartening and diverse voter turnout and a significantly improved security climate. Based on that success, UNAMI will once again provide technical assistance and advice to Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission as it prepares for two upcoming votes: the Kurdistan regional government elections in July, and the Iraqi parliamentary elections in January 2010.

Secondly, UNAMI will also continue to play a crucial role in supporting efforts to address Iraq's disputed internal boundaries. By promoting constructive dialogue about a mutually acceptable solution, UNAMI is helping to provide a key requirement for lasting stability in Iraq, and we call upon all relevant parties to advance this process in earnest.

Thirdly, UNAMI will provide valuable support to the Iraqi Government as it facilitates the safe, voluntary and orderly return of displaced Iraqis. Here, too, UNAMI's work is critically important. The sustainable and voluntary reintegration into Iraqi life of refugees and internally displaced persons is essential for the country's long-term stability. To support and sustain the return of those uprooted by war and chaos, UNAMI is working with the Iraqi Government to provide them with security and access to housing, jobs and basic services. We welcome additional efforts on this issue by the Government of Iraq.

All of us here can be proud of UNAMI's outstanding record of accomplishment. We deeply appreciate its work and look forward to its continued success.

The United States firmly supports Iraq's continuing development as a sovereign and democratic nation, a country in which all of its diverse and vibrant communities can participate freely in political, social and economic life and in which human rights are protected, a country that contributes to the peace and security of the region, a country that is sovereign, stable and self-reliant.

To build on the progress we have made, regional and international support for Iraq is essential. We encourage all countries to help Iraq meet its goals and to support the Iraqi people as they pursue prosperity and peace. The United States unequivocally encourages UNAMI's work and its expanded footprint in Iraq. My Government stands ready to continue to assist UNAMI as necessary, and we encourage all countries to do the same.

Finally, the United States fully supports the presidential statement circulated by the Turkish presidency. It is an important signal of support for UNAMI and for the people of Iraq.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by hailing your presence with us here today, Mr. President. We thank you for having travelled, for a second time this month, to participate in our work. I wish to thank Ambassador De Mistura in particular for his work throughout all this time, and for the work of his colleagues, who together have contributed to the well-being of the people of Iraq. I thank him for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/284). I greet Ambassador Al Bayati warmly and thank him for his valuable briefing.

As Ambassador De Mistura has indicated, there has been significant progress in Iraq in recent months in different areas. In particular, we are happy to hear that the Government of Iraq has strengthened the electoral processes, based on the experience garnered. We hope the upcoming elections in Kurdistan and the parliamentary elections will be inclusive and

transparent and will include the active participation of women. These electoral processes are valuable opportunities, as the Secretary-General said, to strengthen local governing and to legitimize the authority of the State throughout the entirety of Iraqi territory.

Costa Rica wishes to urge the political leaders of Iraq to continue their work to promote progress for all their population by way of equitable mechanisms. We call on them to ensure that all of the fruit of Iraq's enormous wealth is distributed among the population.

Along these lines, we urge the United Nations team in Iraq, as well as the international donors, to continue to work closely with the Iraqi authorities in the creation of a normative environment that allows for the implementation of the necessary reforms in the public sector and the necessary regulation of the private sector, so as to facilitate the achievement of the development goals. Economic, social and political development also presupposes that governments be receptive, transparent and responsible in all levels vis-à-vis their citizens. It is in this context that we believe that in order to optimize the benefits of public investment, it is necessary to strengthen the anti-corruption policies.

Costa Rica is convinced that improvements in security cannot be made at the expense of fundamental freedoms or the full enjoyment and protection of the human rights on the part of the population of Iraq. We note with great concern the observations contained in the most recent report on the human rights situation in Iraq prepared by UNAMI. We regret that recent security improvements have not been accompanied by a strengthening of the rule of law or by a systematic approach to combating impunity. We are concerned that despite the establishment of the Independent High Commission for Human Rights, sufficient budgetary funds have not been allocated to that body to enable it to begin its work in 2009. We hope that the Iraqi authorities will swiftly honour their commitments to strengthen and broaden the protection of the rights of the Iraqi population by establishing independent institutions to monitor and supervise human rights, as Ambassador Al Bayati stated during the previous Council debate on UNAMI and reiterated today.

Costa Rica urges that it is of fundamental importance that Iraq uphold its commitments to human rights by ratifying key international instruments and ensuring the effective implementation of those it has already ratified, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Before concluding, I wish to put on record our concern with regard to the reported intention to reinstate the practice of executing convicted individuals in Iraq. My country, which abolished the death penalty in 1877 and recently supported an initiative in the General Assembly promoting a global moratorium on executions, respectfully urges the Government of Iraq to suspend such executions. We are similarly concerned by the paragraphs of the report noting the lack of reliable information on the prison population and the overcrowding of detention centres. We share the concern expressed in the report regarding the absence of guarantees required by standards with respect to human rights and fair trials. We should also like to register our concern at the persistence of interrogation procedures that, according to the report, could be tantamount to torture. We hope that the Government of Iraq will translate its political will into concrete actions, that it will ratify the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol, as well as the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Aiming at the Abolition of the Death Penalty.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you as President of the Council.

At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. De Mistura of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for his briefing on the situation in Iraq. We should also like to expression our appreciation of his work in leading UNAMI and to wish him success in his new — and in some ways old — job leading the World Food Programme.

We share the assessment that has been made in the quarterly report on the work of UNAMI. It is balanced and provides an overall objective reflection of the current situation in Iraq, as well as of the ongoing processes in many areas of political and economic life in the country, where we have seen some positive progress. At the same time, we remain concerned by the security sector situation. Terrorism continues to pose a threat, as do increased activity of armed groups and ongoing inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions.

Strategically, the work of UNAMI should focus on continued efforts to foster the process of national reconciliation, which for now is clearly stalled. We welcome UNAMI efforts aimed at encouraging Iraqi leaders to seek mutually acceptable solutions to political and socio-economic problems and create an effective government system in which all ethnicities and religions can participate. Without this, efforts to normalize the internal political situation, maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq and establish a just distribution of income from the exploitation of natural resources will fail.

One of the principal goals of the United Nations in Iraq is to act as a coordinating centre for the stabilization of the country, including efforts to prepare for the parliamentary elections scheduled for January next year and the regional elections in Kurdistan in July. In our view, the future presence of the United Nations in Iraq depends in a large part on UNAMI's effectiveness in facilitating the successful holding of elections and in assisting the electoral council. We must strengthen the partnership between UNAMI and the Government of Iraq by supporting the Government in taking the lead in stabilizing the internal situation.

At the moment, we must note that the initial stages of the pre-electoral process have lead to some internal political tension. The coming of the elections may well provoke greater religious and interethnic problems. We therefore welcome UNAMI efforts to encourage inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue and we call on the Mission to continue to focus its efforts on this issue.

Despite the progress in the security sector reported by the Government, we are concerned by the increase in the number of violent incidents, which rose by one third in the month of April. We also remain concerned about the situation in the disputed areas, where tensions persist between the Kurdish population on one side and the Turkmen and Arab populations on the other. There is a positive role for UNAMI to play in countering these tensions. We look forward to the official publication of the report by UNAMI on the disputed areas. It is our view that this document could be of great value if it maintains a purely analytical and advisory nature and doesn't presume to anticipate the sovereign decisions that must be taken by the Iraqi people themselves on this issue, which is exceedingly sensitive to all ethnic and religious groups. In this context, it is important to be informed of Iraqi opinion on Mission documents.

Another important issue for us is the relationship between Iraq and its regional neighbours. Without more cooperation between Baghdad and neighbouring countries and without the constructive involvement of those neighbours in an Iraqi settlement process, achieving security in Iraq will remain difficult. We welcome UNAMI efforts to support the development of bilateral relations between Iraq and its neighbours.

In conclusion, the Russian delegation supports the draft presidential statement reflecting the position of the Security Council on the questions related to Iraq.

Mr. La Yifan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank Your Excellency Mr. Davutoglu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, for presiding over our meeting today. I wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura and the representative of Iraq for their briefings. This is the last appearance of Mr. De Mistura in the Security Council in his current capacity as Special Representative of the Secretary-General. I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the major contribution that he has made to aiding peace and reconstruction in Iraq. I wish to thank him and wish him every success in his future endeavours.

Earlier this year, provincial elections were held successfully in Iraq. The Council of Representatives laid down plans to accelerate its legislative work. The Iraqi Security Forces have been assuming an increasing level of responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the country. The progress that has been achieved in all areas in Iraq deserves full recognition. At the same time, we must not ignore the fact that Iraq is still confronting multiple challenges in the political, security, reconstruction, human rights and national reconciliation areas. Bombing incidents still frequently occur. The issue of disputed internal boundaries remains unresolved. Economic recovery and reconstruction need greater support from the international community. Large numbers of refugees and displaced persons need to return to their homes and be resettled, and the rights and interests of women and children must be more effectively secured.

The primary responsibility for the future and destiny of Iraq rests with the Iraqi Government and people themselves. For Iraq to have a good future all the political leaders of Iraq must put the national

interest above all else and seek reconciliation, consensus and cooperation. We support efforts by the Iraqi Government to take measures conducive to the stability, unity and development of the country, and we hope that the Iraqi Government and the various parties in the country can join in continuing to make good progress in national reconciliation, development of legislation, accelerated reconstruction and the protection of human rights. We hope that the Kurdistan regional Government and the parliamentary elections will proceed smoothly and successfully.

Progress in the security and political fields can be fully consolidated only by promoting economic and social reconstruction. We appeal to the international community to effectively honour its pledges of assistance to Iraq and to help Iraq to accelerate its reconstruction and development. We support reviewing the priorities of the International Compact for Iraq in the light of the needs of the current situation. We are pleased to see that Iraq has been improving and strengthening its relations with its neighbours in the region.

Iraq's improvement of relations with regional countries is conducive to its stability and reconstruction and is also in the common interest of the neighbouring regions. The international community should acknowledge and continue to encourage and support Iraqi cooperation with countries in the region through multiple regional mechanisms and bilateral initiatives.

Under the leadership of Mr. De Mistura, UNAMI has achieved good results through gradual and focused efforts on all fronts to implement its mandate under resolution 1770 (2007). We expect UNAMI to continue to strengthen cooperation with the Iraqi Government, to provide assistance to key elections in Iraq, to make reasonable and feasible recommendations with regard to the political dialogue in Iraq and to push for greater progress in Iraqi national reconciliation.

We also expect UNAMI to continue to coordinate humanitarian assistance to Iraq, including creating the necessary conditions for the return, resettlement and integration of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons. We also hope that UNAMI will provide greater assistance to the Iraqi people in the area of human rights.

We support efforts by the United Nations to continue to expand its presence and activities in Iraq in the light of that country's needs. At the same time, we appeal to the parties concerned to take effective measures to enhance the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

China supports Iraq's resumption of its international status. We look forward to the Secretary-General submitting a report pursuant to resolution 1859 (2008).

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his presentation of the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/284) on the situation in Iraq and, as he is completing his post as the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), to pay tribute to him for his valuable contribution to the settlement of the Iraq issue. I also thank the representative of Iraq for his statement.

Not long ago, we congratulated the Iraqi people and Government for the achievements made in the democratization process, in particular the successful provincial elections and the progressive recovery of control of their country and destiny. Today, we encourage the Iraqi Government, whatever difficulties remain, to persevere in its efforts to preserve that progress, in particular in national reconstruction and in the strengthening of its authority throughout its territory.

In that regard, we are pleased to note that the Iraqis are sincerely committed to the national reconciliation process, which, as we know, is the precondition for the success of all other actions, in particular the settlement of disputes over internal boundaries, the sharing of natural resources and the issue of federalism.

We also welcome the successful elections in the governorates and their fine organization by the Independent High Electoral Commission. We hope that the electoral preparations coming in 2009 and 2010 will, like previous ones, be crowned with success.

However, Iraq continues to face numerous challenges. For that reason, good coordination and cooperation among UNAMI, the multinational force and the Iraqi Security Forces are essential to ensure the stability of the country. However, it is primarily up to the Iraqis themselves to work towards strengthening peace and ensuring a harmonious development of their country.

Different factors point to that legitimate aspiration for peace, hence the recent analytical reports on the disputes over the internal boundaries in north Iraq and the technical and logical assistance provided to the relevant parliamentary committee in order to work out a consensus on the status of Kirkuk. Furthermore, we hope that the lessons learned by the members of the committee from the experience of Northern Ireland will contribute to better understanding and resolving the issues of power-sharing, political reform and reform of the province's constitutional status.

The successful unfolding of the national development strategy is also a very encouraging indication of efforts for Iraq's recovery, and, in that context, no one doubts that the adoption in February 2009 in Naples of a new approach towards international assistance will bolster that strategy, as will the decisions of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to establish a United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Iraq from 2011 to 2014 and the planned future review of the Iraq Compact with the help of the Special Adviser, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari.

In the area of human rights, we welcome the initiatives taken by the United Nations and the Iraqi Government to promote gender equality and parity and to ensure implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

Finally, it seems essential to us to stress that strengthening regional cooperation remains an important element in the post-conflict strategy in Iraq. While congratulating the regional actors for their foresight, we are grateful to UNAMI and the Special Representative for the efforts made to strengthen confidence and cooperation among the countries of the region.

Peace and stability in Iraq are essential to calm in the region and the world as a whole. No effort must thus be spared so that lasting security is quickly restored in that country.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): Let me first of all thank you, Your Excellency, for assuming the presidency of this very important meeting. I would also like to thank Special Representative De Mistura for his briefing and commend the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for its unwavering commitment to assist the people of Iraq in rebuilding their country. I would also like to express Austria's appreciation for your extraordinary personal dedication, courage and leadership, in particular in promoting dialogue and national and political reconciliation. I would also like to thank the representative of Iraq for his statement.

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report (S/2009/284) national reconciliation remains the main priority for a stable and peaceful Iraq. We welcome the recent initiative of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to launch a high-level dialogue between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan regional Government on the disputed internal boundaries. It is of very great importance that leaders on all sides focus on national reconciliation in the run-up to the Kurdistan regional elections next month and the national elections in January 2010.

On the issue of power-sharing, property and demography in Kirkuk, we welcome the assistance that UNAMI has provided to the parliamentary committee. We regret that the committee has not yet been in a position to report back on progress. We expect continued and genuine commitment on the part of all to resolving the outstanding issues concerning the allocation of Government posts.

In view of budgetary challenges due to the economic crisis and declining oil revenues, national and regional leaders need to overcome the deadlock on the regulation of the hydrocarbon sector. This would also be very beneficial to encouraging foreign investment in the country. The signing of the memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation with the European Union would be equally beneficial in that regard.

The recent rise in indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including by suicide bombers, is a stark reminder of the fragility of the hard-won security gains. Manifold challenges persist.

We are encouraged that Iraq's internally displaced continue to return to their communities. At the same time, we share the Secretary-General's view that increased efforts towards integration, resettlement and return are critical to allow for sustainable returns in safety and dignity. This would also convey the message to the more than 1.5 million Iraqi refugees abroad that they, too, can have a future back home. We recognize the immense efforts of the Syrian and Jordanian Governments to accommodate Iraqi refugees.

As UNAMI's human rights report underlines, additional steps to strengthen the rule of law and end impunity are necessary. We are encouraged by Iraq's commitment to strengthening the protection of human rights. We therefore hope that the recommendations contained in the report — in particular those relevant to the protection of women, children and vulnerable groups — will be implemented as soon as possible. The Independent High Commission for Human Rights could and should make an important contribution to these endeavours. We therefore very much hope that the Iraqi authorities will soon make it possible for the Commission to begin its important work.

We welcome the progress made towards Iraq's ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and hope that it will provide fresh impetus to the reform of the criminal justice system. We urge Iraq to reinstate the moratorium on executions observed since August 2007. I also wish to recall the statement of the European Union on this subject.

Austria and the European Union stand ready to support Iraq's efforts to strengthen respect for human rights and the rule of law, including by translating the national strategy to combat corruption into action. These efforts are essential to rebuilding the trust of the Iraqi people in their institutions. The equal participation of women will be critical if that goal is to be achieved. As Iraqi Security Forces assume increasing levels of responsibility, we would particularly encourage engaging women in the police and in the army.

Let me underline Austria's firm commitment to supporting the efforts of the people and the Government of Iraq to make the country democratic, unified and prosperous. We therefore also support the early conclusion of a partnership and cooperation agreement between Iraq and the European Union. We hope for a further strengthening of Iraq's re-engagement with its neighbours, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, and early progress in negotiations — including, I wish to underline, bilateral negotiations — towards the resolution of outstanding bilateral issues.

Finally, let me say that we are grateful to you, Sir, and to the United States of America for preparing today's draft presidential statement. It has our full support.

Mr. Puente (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are honoured, Sir, by your presence here today as you preside over the work of the Security Council. My delegation welcomes you once again.

Like other delegations, we wish to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his detailed briefing. We take this opportunity to acknowledge his work at the helm of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We are convinced that he will be equally successful in his future responsibilities. We wish him all the best.

We also wish to thank Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati for his detailed statement, which clearly reflected the progress that has recently been made in his country.

Following the latest review of United Nations activities in February, the Iraqi Government has pursued its efforts to strengthen democracy, exert effective control over the national territory, and improve security and the living conditions of the Iraqi people. We must not only praise those efforts, but also encourage the Government of Iraq to continue along the same line, with the support of the international community, in particular as it faces important electoral deadlines in late 2009 and early 2010. That will certainly strengthen the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq and ensure the right of its people freely to determine their economic and political future. It will also allow them effectively to control their natural resources.

In that respect, we note with satisfaction that significant progress has been made in recent months in various sectors of Iraq's national life. In the electoral field, the successful and peaceful holding of provincial elections on 31 January confirmed the commitment of the Government and the people of Iraq to democracy and strengthened local institutions, which will improve the people's standards of living. The work of the Independent High Electoral Commission is deserving of special recognition. With the support of the Iraq authorities, UNAMI and the international community, it ensured that the elections were held in optimal conditions, thus guaranteeing the legitimacy and impartiality of the results. The fruitful cooperation between the High Commission, the Government and UNAMI should continue throughout the preparation for the regional elections in July and the parliamentary elections in January 2010.

On the political scene, the election in April of the new Speaker of Parliament will promote progress on outstanding legislative and constitutional matters. It will also help to strengthen the foundations of national reconciliation, which is of high priority for Iraq, as Ambassador Al Bayati noted.

With respect to security, in February we welcomed the entry into force of the bilateral security agreement between the Governments of Iraq and the United States. The agreement is the basis for the transfer of responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces.

On the issue of sovereignty, we note with pleasure that United States troops have begun to withdraw from their former bases, while Iraqi forces are increasing their participation in and responsibility for ensuring domestic security, pursuant to the bilateral security agreement. The process is of great importance to Mexico, which has always favoured the strengthening of Iraq's sovereignty and spoken up on behalf of its autonomy.

At the regional level, the Government has demonstrated its ability to consolidate and strengthen relations with its neighbours and laid the groundwork for bilateral relations with the countries of the region. We therefore welcome the decision to incorporate the strengthening of regional relations into the priorities of the International Compact with Iraq, with the support of UNAMI. Moreover, thanks to UNAMI's interlocutory role, dialogue has begun on the disputed internal borders and the status of Kirkuk. Such dialogue is critical to establishing lasting peace in the country and has recently borne fruit, as Mr. De Mistura indicated.

Iraq's current situation is the complete antithesis of that which prevailed in previous years. However, as in all reconstruction processes, important pending challenges hinder national reconciliation and the country's economic development. We are particularly concerned about the frequent and massive indiscriminate attacks that have claimed numerous civilian casualties. We firmly condemn such unacceptable practices of intimidation and join the Secretary-General in urging Iraqis not to succumb to them. We trust in the Iraqi Security Forces to confront the armed groups inciting sectarian violence and to exert gradually increasing control throughout Iraqi territory while safeguarding human rights.

In this respect, my delegation shares the concern expressed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/284) with regard to the decision to reinstate the death penalty, which Mexico is opposed to. We invite the Iraqi authorities to suspend this practice. We also call for particular attention to be paid to respect for the rights of women.

In addition, we welcome the establishment of the Independent High Commission for Human Rights, which will make it possible to progressively address these challenges. We also welcome the proposal for United Nations support to contribute to the consolidation of that Commission. We hope that the necessary funds for the financing of the Commission will be provided soon. This would contribute to strengthening the capacity of Iraqi institutions in the area of human rights protection and would establish better practices for the treatment of detainees and judicial processes, including fair trials and due process.

The persistent lack of security in the country has generated a constant flow of internally displaced persons and refugees, undermining the long-term development of the country. For this reason, we are pleased to note the fact that, since the beginning of 2008, nearly 50,000 families have returned to their places of origin. We invite the Iraqi authorities to continue to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in order to ensure the return of refugees and internally displaced persons in the best possible conditions while ensuring respect for their dignity.

Reconstruction and the economic development of the country are essential for a solution to all of the remaining problems and are intimately bound to an improvement in security conditions and the strengthening of institutions and of the rule of law. The support of UNAMI and the international community should be channelled towards these aspects in order to consolidate future development in Iraq. We welcome recent initiatives by the Government of Iraq to strengthen its economic and social development.

In this respect, Mexico has contributed, through the Central Emergency Response Fund, to addressing the health epidemics that have affected more than 10,000 people in the country. Mexico is one of the biggest supporters of this programme.

I would like to conclude by recognizing the work of UNAMI personnel and the important role that this

Mission has played in substantially improving the living conditions of Iraqis. Its presence has allowed for the consolidation of an independent and sovereign Government and has facilitated assistance to the humanitarian and reconstruction work to be done.

In the future, UNAMI will have the opportunity to continue to support Iraq in crucial initiatives such as the International Compact for Iraq, the holding of regional and national elections, the national assistance strategy and the issue of human rights. The future of Iraq and the well-being of Iraqis depend on the determination of its Government and the support of the international community in facing these remaining challenges.

For all of these reasons, we thank the presidency of the Council for having prepared the draft presidential statement, to which my delegation fully adheres.

Mr. Vilović (Croatia): Allow me to begin by expressing our pleasure, Mr. Minister, for having you personally here to preside over this meeting. I would also like to extend our warm welcome to Mr. De Mistura and to thank him for the briefing he provided to us today as well as for his personal engagement, leadership and achievements in Iraq. I wish him all the best in his future work.

Croatia welcomes the ongoing United Nations contribution to the promotion and consolidation of peace, stability, democracy, human rights and development in Iraq. In view of their approaching departures from their respective functions, I would like to use the opportunity to express once again Croatia's appreciation to Mr. De Mistura and his Deputy, Mr. Shearer, for their hard work and for the dedicated personal efforts they have invested in carrying out the mandate of the Mission.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) continues to play a vital role in Iraq. Its expanding engagement and presence provides valuable support to the Iraqi Government and the people of Iraq in addressing the remaining challenges. We salute the efforts that the Special Representative and his team are investing in facilitating political dialogue, notably their good offices on the issue of disputed internal boundaries and the status of Kirkuk. Also, we value their role in assisting national and regional dialogue, offering expertise on unresolved constitutional issues and providing electoral and human rights support.

Croatia fully stands behind the messages contained in the draft presidential statement that the Council is about to adopt today, reaffirming its support for UNAMI and for the people and Government of Iraq in their efforts to rebuild a stable, secure and democratic country.

Iraq has made remarkable progress over recent years. The provincial election held earlier this year, the first one to be Iraqi-led and Iraqi-owned, augurs well for the country's future. We are also encouraged by the successful start of voter registration in Kurdistan. We see those electoral processes as a manifestation of a broader trend, one in which Iraqis are increasingly taking responsibility for their own affairs. Moreover, they have set in motion local democratic processes, which should be channelled into the national dialogue.

We call on the leadership of Iraq to make the most of those recent positive trends on both the political and the security levels and to translate this momentum into national reconciliation that will lead to lasting peace and stability and economic and social development. We hope that this will generate tangible improvements that will be felt in the daily lives of ordinary Iraqis, thus locking in the progress achieved.

National reconciliation, as Mr. De Mistura and the Secretary-General in his report (S/2009/284), have rightly emphasized, remains the most pressing challenge. Ultimately, only a political settlement can guarantee the irreversibility of recent positive trends and achievements. We call upon Iraqi leaders to rise above sectarian interests, to apply themselves to dialogue and to search for compromise solutions, notably on the crucial questions of hydrocarbons legislation, constitutional review and internal boundaries.

Croatia strongly supports UNAMI's focus on the issues of boundaries and the status of Kirkuk, appreciates its initiative and analytical input, and hopes to see early progress.

We welcome the strengthening of the security sector and the continued expansion of the authority of Iraqi security forces throughout the country. However, the recent wave of sectarian and terrorist violence and increasing tensions in several areas give rise to serious concerns. Croatia strongly condemns the recent terrorist attacks. The extremists' agenda should not be allowed to derail Iraq from the path of peace and democratic transformation. This threat only underscores the urgency

of advancing the reconciliation agenda, as it is innocent civilians who continue to bear the brunt of indiscriminate violence.

Croatia is apprehensive about the multifaceted challenges facing the Government of Iraq, including reconstruction and economic growth. As the report rightly observes, resources should be spent in areas that will make a lasting difference to social and economic revival. We understand that there are still pockets of serious humanitarian needs, and we appreciate the Government's efforts to address the situation of refugees, displaced persons and returnees. Creating jobs and infrastructure is essential to bringing about a tangible sense of progress for the people of Iraq, together with an underlying sense of peace and stability. We expect the Government of Iraq to build on the recent security improvements and welcome its efforts aimed at ensuring good governance and the rule of law, including recent steps to combat corruption.

Regional cooperation and constructive dialogue with Iraq's neighbours remain critical components in long-term stabilization. Conversely, durable peace and stability in Iraq remain critical for regional security, which in turn is critical for international security. We are encouraged by intensified high-level bilateral contacts and support continued engagement by UNAMI in promoting bilateral cooperation initiatives as well as regional engagement.

As Iraq progressively assumes full sovereignty, Croatia fully supports the view that it has become necessary for the Council to re-examine the set of obligations imposed on the country under the regime of Saddam Hussein and to realign Iraq's international legal standing in accordance with its new circumstances. As the Council is about to begin the review process in accordance with resolution 1859 (2008), we are ready to work with others towards achieving durable solutions that will duly reflect this new reality.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to say how pleased we are at seeing you, Mr. President, personally presiding over this meeting, which reflects your great interest in the situation in Iraq. We would also like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his extensive briefing and for all his efforts as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq. We acknowledge and commend the excellent role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) under his leadership. I should also like to thank Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati, Permanent Representative of Iraq, for his valuable statement.

UNAMI has done substantial work in the period under review. It has had great success despite all the challenges and difficulties it faces, especially in the area of security. We would therefore like to underscore the need to strengthen the role of the United Nations and its specialized agencies in Iraq as an alternative to the presence of foreign troops in Iraq.

Also in this period, Iraq has made great progress on the political front by holding local elections in 14 provinces in January, including elections for provincial councils. In that regard, we should like to acknowledge and commend the efforts of UNAMI and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to support the Independent High Electoral Commission and to resolve disputes about internal boundaries in Iraq. We hope that tensions in the area of Kirkuk can be brought to an end and that a political solution can be achieved in line with Iraq's Constitution that satisfies all parties and strengthens the unity of all segments of Iraqi society.

We urge the Mission and the Special Representative to continue their neutral role, so as to build confidence between the parties, encourage national reconciliation and help to promote dialogue. We also urge them to work in consultation with the Iraqi Government to achieve consensus among all parties on disputed matters and to establish lasting security throughout Iraq, which is a prerequisite for development and prosperity.

The ongoing tensions and military operations in the period under review once again lead us to reiterate that the continued presence of occupation forces, under whatever format, will be a cause for continued instability. The withdrawal of such forces will contribute to achieving national reconciliation, which is essential for Iraq's stability, reconstruction and prosperity, as well as an important element in promoting and strengthening relations with its neighbours. Withdrawal would also contribute to reducing the level of support enjoyed by armed groups and factions, especially those that claim that they are operating against foreign troops in Iraq.

In that regard, I would like to mention paragraph 48 of the report (S/2009/284) of the Secretary-General,

which refers the readiness of the Iraqi Security Forces to take over responsibilities from the multinational forces. We hope that that process will be expedited.

The Secretary-General's report also states that there is a possibility that Iraq's budget deficit for the 2008 fiscal year could reach $15.9 billion. Were that to occur, it would be the highest deficit in the past six years. That could hinder or delay reconstruction and impede the implementation of Iraqi Government policies. We hope that the rise in the price of oil may contribute to reducing or completely eliminating that figure. In that regard, we would like to emphasize that it is important that the countries that led the invasion of Iraq bear the responsibility for financing the special international funds set up to assist the country.

On the humanitarian front, we note with satisfaction the ongoing return of internally displaced persons and refugees. However, we continue to be very concerned about the fact that there are still millions of Iraqi refugees outside the country, especially in neighbouring States. We hope that the Iraqi Government and United Nations agencies will give top priority to the issue of the return of refugees and provide the necessary contingencies and conditions for that to occur.

In spite of the relative progress made in the area of human rights, we continue to be concerned about certain incidents that have resulted in the deaths of several civilians and politicians, as we are about killings and attacks against various groups in Iraqi society.

We are also very concerned about the fact that more than 10,000 persons are being detained by the occupying forces and that Iraqi authorities have rearrested some of them as soon as they are freed from detention facilities under the control of foreign forces. Iraqi authorities hold those people under difficult circumstances, without having secured arrest warrants against them from the judiciary and without giving them fair trials. We hope that that will change soon.

The situation in Iraq today is very different from what it was when resolution 661 (1990) was adopted. The time has come for the Security Council to take the necessary steps to allow Iraq to resume the international and legal status it enjoyed before that instrument was adopted.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): I wish to join others in welcoming you to the Council once again, Mr. President, as well as to thank you for personally chairing today's meeting. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura for his briefing on the situation in Iraq and the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I congratulate him on his leadership of the Mission during a very challenging period in UNAMI's operations. We wish him every success in his new position. I also thank Ambassador Al Bayati of Iraq for his contribution to our discussions today.

For the past six months, we have seen a consistent positive trend in the overall political and security situation in Iraq. Serious efforts have been made to form provincial councils in 14 governorates and to strengthen local governance institutions following the successful provincial elections earlier this year. A new Speaker of Parliament has been elected, putting an end to a four-month hiatus and opening up prospects for progress on pending legislation needed for the country's recovery. The strengthened ability of the Iraqi Security Forces to assume greater security responsibilities serves to prepare the ground for further security improvements under Iraq's sovereignty. The fact that returns of internally displaced persons are continuing at a steady rate, despite the rise in violence, reflects the restored confidence of the population.

High-level visits to and from Iraq have enhanced the country's international relations, above all with neighbouring partners. We are, however, mindful of the multiple challenges that Iraq is facing. Those include, inter alia, the recent surge of indiscriminate attacks against civilians, alongside regular attacks against the Iraqi Security Forces and the multinational force in many parts of the country; the delicate reconciliation process, further complicated by the difficult economic situation, with a budget deficit projected at 27 per cent this year; the worrisome rates of poverty and unemployment and the outbreaks of disease and food insecurity, all of which are making the livelihood of fragile groups of the population, such as women, children, internally displaced persons and refugees, even more vulnerable.

In that context, it is crucial for the Government of Iraq and its citizens to strengthen the progress recorded so far, move ahead on the course of national reconciliation, reconstruction and reintegration, resolve

the status of Kirkuk and other disputed internal administrative boundaries, push forward the constitutional review process, reach an accord on income-sharing arrangements, and prepare for the elections in Kirkuk, possible referendums, district and sub-district elections, the national parliamentary elections this year and other key electoral events next year.

All these issues cannot be dealt with in isolation and will require the goodwill and firm commitment of all concerned stakeholders. We call upon all parties in Iraq to rise above their partisan interests and to work with one another in the spirit of reconciliation, good faith and cooperation with a view to reaching compromise solutions that would allow the country to march ahead under a common vision and along the track of peace.

Given the fact that the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq will come to a close by the end of this year, the International Compact for Iraq is approaching its third year of implementation, and international financing for reconstruction and development is diminishing, we endorse the imperative need expressed in the Paris Declaration to ensure ownership, accountability and transparency of aid. We believe that international and regional assistance should be better coordinated to help Iraq address its national socio-economic priorities, and that this should be done through every related mechanism, be it the International Compact for Iraq, the United Nations Development Group Iraq Trust Fund, the Paris Declaration principles, the expanded ministerial meetings, or the regional working groups on energy, refugees and security.

We commend the courageous work of UNAMI in Iraq as mandated by Security Council resolutions 1770 (2007) and 1830 (2008). We welcome the decision by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to start with a full United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Iraq from 2011 to 2014, in line with Iraq's National Development Strategy. We also welcome the Secretary-General's announcement that he will soon present to the Security Council a report on the review of all Security Council resolutions pertaining specifically to Iraq, in accordance with resolution 1859 (2008).

As Iraq is in the midst of a critical transition period, we reiterate Viet Nam's commitment to contributing practically to the reconstruction of Iraq.

Finally, we thank the delegation of Turkey for proposing the draft presidential statement, which we are ready to support.

Mr. Rugunda (Uganda): I welcome you, Sir, and salute the fact that you are presiding over this meeting personally. The fact that you have come to chair the meeting shows the significance which the presidency attaches to this very meeting. My delegation thanks Mr. De Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for his encouraging briefing and Mr. Al Bayati, the Permanent Representative of Iraq, for his statement.

Uganda welcomes the overall progress and improvement in the political and security situation in Iraq. We commend the reconciliation efforts spearheaded by Prime Minister al-Maliki, aimed at bringing together all Iraqis, including former Baath Party members. We are convinced that the durable peace and stability that we all seek will come only through the leadership of the Iraqi people, supported by the international community. We therefore welcome the agreements reached on the selection of the new Speaker of Parliament, and encourage different sections of the Iraqi society to build on this and other achievements to create a more stable and peaceful Iraq.

We congratulate the people of Iraq for holding successful and largely peaceful provincial elections, which also enabled the selection of governors and their deputies. We commend the Independent High Electoral Commission for the work done in organizing the elections.

As Iraq prepares for Kurdistan regional government elections in July 2009 and national parliamentary elections in 2010, we call upon the Electoral Commission to build on the achievements gained in organizing successful provincial elections. We commend UNAMI's continued assistance to the Iraqi people and the Iraqi Government in that regard.

My delegation appreciates UNAMI's continued work in support of the Government of Iraq to help create conducive conditions for the safe return of Iraqi refugees and the resettlement of internally displaced persons. We welcome the important regional developments characterized by high-level visits between Iraq and other countries of the region during the reporting period. The security, stability and

development of Iraq are inextricably linked to the peace, stability and development of the region.

There are still challenges to be addressed in order to consolidate the gains so far made. We note that the resolution of the disputed internal boundaries remains among the indispensable elements for lasting peace in Iraq. We encourage Iraqi leaders to work more closely together in a spirit of national unity and to adopt political, constitutional and legislative measures to address the challenges.

Finally, Uganda extends its appreciation to Mr. De Mistura for his work and good leadership of UNAMI. We commend all of the United Nations staff in Iraq for their contributions towards the stability and security of Iraq. Uganda supports the draft presidential statement that has been prepared by the United States and Turkey to convey the Security Council's position on the situation in Iraq.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to you, Sir, for presiding over today's Council meeting.

I thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for a useful briefing. Also, as all my colleagues have mentioned, this will be the last time Mr. De Mistura will appear before the Council in his capacity. I wish to add my voice to express our deep and profound gratitude to him for completing his very difficult tasks under challenging circumstances and for his many years of dedicated work for the cause of the United Nations. I also think all members of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) should be congratulated for their great work.

I would also like to congratulate Ambassador Al Bayati today for his very useful statement and for his report of the progress that the Iraqi people and Government have made so far.

We are pleased with the positive developments during this period, including the election of the new Speaker of Parliament and the formation of provincial councils. It is encouraging that Iraq continues to make such progress, but obviously many challenges remain. We agree with many of our colleagues that national reconciliation is the most important challenge for the stability of the country. We very much welcome that Prime Minister al-Maliki is calling for a renewal of the national reconciliation effort.

A representative and inclusive democratic process will be an essential basis for national reconciliation. The preparations for the Council of Representatives elections are under way. We hope that there will be a higher turnout than for earlier elections and that this time the electoral process will be well established as a norm for Iraq's people, that political grievances and differences are to be dealt with not with bullets but through the ballot box. We support the important role that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) plays in assisting the Independent High Electoral Commission.

The disputed internal boundaries are another important issue for national reconciliation. UNAMI has made a valuable contribution by providing analytical reports. We hope that the reports will support the Iraq's people in coming to an agreement on the disputed internal boundaries issue, including the status of Kirkuk.

Those issues will have implications for the Constitution. We believe UNAMI can also play a useful role in helping the Iraqi people resolve these complex interrelated issues.

In the area of security, we note that the recent security incidents clearly indicate that the gains achieved in this area continue to be precarious. The United States forces will leave Iraqi cities at the end of June. We hope that the Iraqi forces will step up to the challenge of maintaining security themselves.

Another important issue is Iraq's relations with its neighbours. We appreciate that UNAMI provides support to advance bilateral cooperation with Iraq's neighbours. We also look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report, as requested with resolution 1859 (2008).

With regard to economic recovery, we welcome the strong initiatives by Iraq's people in the country's efforts for recovery, reconstruction and development. The fluctuation in oil prices poses a challenge to Iraqi Government's budget. But we are confident that the Government can meet the challenges. Japan has provided $1.7 billion in grant aid, and we have just exchanged notes with the Iraqi Government to provide official development assistance through a loan up to $2.43 billion for 12 projects in areas of transportation, energy, industrial plants and irrigation.

Japan is committed to assisting Iraqi people together with other members of the international community. We are very confident that Foreign

Minister Zebari's visit to Japan will not only solidify our bilateral relations, which are already excellent, but will also provide a useful opportunity for constructive dialogue on the important challenges that Iraq faces today.

I would like to conclude by reiterating Japan's strong support for the Government and people of Iraq.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

I would first like to join others in thanking Special Representative Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his insightful presentation, but more so for his unrelenting and keen efforts at the helm of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Indeed, during his rather short tenure, he energized the entire United Nations team in assisting the Iraqi Government and people in their quest for peace and stability. This took place at a critical point in time, when Iraq's need for United Nations assistance was perhaps greater than ever. Under his able leadership UNAMI has played a most constructive role. It provided expertise and analysis, bridged differences and helped bring about positive change.

However, the job of the United Nations is still far from over. In the months and years ahead there will be an equally pressing need for it to continue to support Iraq. We hope that Mr. De Mistura's successor will carry the flag even further.

Of course, not only the United Nations but the entire international community, first and foremost the Iraqi Government and people themselves, should rise to the occasion. We must all collectively ensure that Iraq embarks upon an irreversible path towards lasting peace, security and prosperity. It is still a tall order to reach that point, but we have no other option. For a united and democratic Iraq, assuming its rightful place within the community of nations will constitute a true success for all of us.

Given what has been achieved in the past six years, we have good reason to be optimistic. Indeed, not long ago, doomsday scenarios of all sorts abounded. Today, despite many risks still ahead of us, we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I myself have been a witness to that evolution. Indeed, I have been to Iraq a few times in this past six years, and every time I go back I observe changes in the right direction. After years of dictatorship plagued by fear, frustration and hatred, the Iraqi people are now trying to make a leap forward with hope, confidence and empathy. And they are feeling good about it. That is because democracy is seen in action at both national and local levels. The security situation is improving despite spikes of violence by extremist elements. There is a growing awareness among political parties to engage in a national dialogue. And more importantly, there is an increasing sense of ownership on the part of the Iraqi people.

These are not modest achievements, given where Iraq was only six years ago. But they are no reason to be complacent, either. We must not let our optimism outrank realism in our assessments for the future of Iraq. It is still at a critical point in its transformation into a stable and democratic State. As a matter of fact, Iraq is on the verge of yet another defining phase in its history. For instance, the parliamentary elections coming up at the beginning of next year will be a crucial turning point in Iraq's young democracy. In view of the irregularities experienced during the last elections, the impartiality and professionalism of the Independent High Electoral Commission will certainly be one of the keys to a successful election process.

But more significantly, the political process itself is fraught with serious pitfalls in the run-up to the elections. Given the considerable and rather confrontational differences among the political parties, efforts towards national reconciliation become all the more important at this critical stage. In particular, ethnic and sectarian harmony in Iraq requires close attention. Differences along these lines have to be addressed within the framework of a meaningful national dialogue, in a way that will strengthen the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq.

Likewise, settlement of the status of Kirkuk and the broader question of disputed administrative boundaries also presents a pressing priority. Thus the ongoing political and legislative processes should be intensified with a view to rapidly resolving this sensitive issue. As a microcosm of Iraq, Kirkuk could and should be a stimulus for national reconciliation.

The peaceful transfer of security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces poses yet another challenge, for the extremist elements will try to exploit this transition to create chaos and fear. We have already started to see the first signs of this threatening development. This is why the training and equipment

of the Iraqi Security Forces should be at the highest possible level at this critical phase leading up to the elections and beyond.

On top of these concerns, fair and just implementation of the amnesty law, facilitation of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, adoption of the long-overdue laws on hydrocarbon resources and revenue sharing, building confidence and cooperation with neighbouring countries, strengthening regional dialogue and, last but not least, combating terrorism originating in Iraq and emerging from it are also among the issues that require urgent and constant attention.

At this point, I would like to stress that the fight against terrorism demands full cooperation within the international community, but more so among the neighbouring countries. In fact, it is an obligation by which all Members of the United Nations are strictly bound. In the case of Iraq, Turkey fully respects that obligation and expects both Iraq and its neighbours to do the same.

Finally, and maybe for the rather longer term, achieving a solid consensus based on the Constitution is imperative for Iraq to become a truly functioning democracy. A unifying constitution that enjoys national consensus is the basis of any democratic system. In Iraq too, the Constitution should reflect a social contract that all parties could embrace and unite around.

As can be seen, the road ahead is not an easy one. Given the manifold challenges, it will certainly be a bumpy ride. But I have full confidence that the Iraqi people and Government will come out of this process with flying colours.

The responsibility of the international community is to stand in solidarity with Iraq in tackling these daunting tasks. Indeed, we must all help the Iraqis take the right steps along this road. This is why we are glad to see that the divisions within the international community which prevailed in the early stages of the post-Saddam era have now given way to a strong and joint commitment to supporting Iraq's desire for peace, security and prosperity.

The United Nations is certainly an integral part of this collective effort and it must continue to play its useful role. United Nations assistance in resolving the question of disputed administrative boundaries and the status of Kirkuk, in particular, is of great importance. The reports prepared by UNAMI on this matter provide a good basis to build upon. We now expect all parties in Iraq to engage in an inclusive dialogue that will yield a consensual solution to this sensitive issue.

On the other hand, the International Compact with Iraq also provides an excellent framework for the international community's engagement with Iraq, in tune with the priorities set by the Iraqi Government itself. Thus, we must constantly review and update the Compact to maintain its effectiveness. This is particularly important given that the global financial crisis and the sharp fall in oil prices have had a rather serious impact on Iraq's economy.

For its part, Turkey will continue to support the development and reconstruction of Iraq. As a matter of fact, Turkey has long provided a significant conduit for the flow of humanitarian and economic assistance to Iraq. Today, the volume of bilateral trade is also rapidly rising. The Turkish-Iraqi High-level Strategic Council led by our Prime Ministers provides firm guidance and impetus to the diversification and advancement of our economic cooperation.

On the political front, too, the frequency of high-level bilateral visits can in itself be seen as an indication of the exemplary nature of our relationship. Indeed, we enjoy good relations with all the political actors in Iraq, and that enables us to play an effective role in encouraging national reconciliation.

Furthermore, the recently signed bilateral military training agreement is yet another clear example of the deepening cooperation between our countries. Through this agreement, we shall provide extensive training to the Iraqi Security Forces in order to strengthen their ability to cope with increased security responsibilities at a critical time.

In short, I would like to reiterate once again that Turkey will spare no effort to help the Iraqi people achieve the peace and prosperity they deserve. As a neighbour, we see this as our responsibility. Our centuries-old ties of common history and culture create an unbreakable bond between us and among all segments of the Iraqi society, ranging from Arabs to Kurds, Turkmen to Assyrians, Shiites to Sunnis. They are all our brothers and sisters, whose security and welfare is as dear to us as our own.

Let me emphasize once again our fine belief that Iraq has a bright future, which is now within reach. We are confident that the Iraqi people will achieve that future by acting in unison and rising above their ethnic and sectarian differences. For our part, we promise to be with them at every step of this honourable journey. I should like to conclude on this rather high note.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of Iraq has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): I have no comment other than to thank you, Sir, for having taken the trouble to travel to New York again during such a short period to preside over this meeting.

I should like to express my thanks and gratitude, as well as the thanks of the Iraqi Government and people, to Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We will miss him. He has done a commendable job in helping Iraq and the Iraqi people. I hope that the United Nations will continue to help Iraq and its people in their affairs, working towards a democratic, pluralistic and stable Iraq.

The President: After consultations among members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

> "The Security Council reaffirms its commitment to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq, and emphasizes the importance of the stability and security of Iraq for its people, the region and the international community.
>
> "The Security Council commends the important efforts made by the Government of Iraq to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, to improve security and public order and combat terrorism and sectarian violence across the country, and reiterates its support to the people and the Government of Iraq in their efforts to build a secure, stable, united and democratic country, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.
>
> "The Security Council reaffirms its full support for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in advising, supporting and assisting the Iraqi people and Government to strengthen democratic institutions, advance inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation, facilitate regional dialogue, aid vulnerable groups, strengthen gender equality, promote the protection of human rights, including through the work of the Independent High Commission for Human Rights, and promote judicial and legal reform.
>
> "The Security Council encourages UNAMI's continued work, in coordination with the Government of Iraq, to help create conditions conducive to voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, and welcomes further attention to this issue by all concerned.
>
> "The Security Council underscores UNAMI's important role in supporting the Iraqi people and Government to promote dialogue, ease tension, and develop a just and fair solution for the nation's disputed internal boundaries, and calls upon all the relevant parties to participate in an inclusive dialogue to this end.
>
> "The Security Council emphasizes UNAMI's efforts to assist the Iraqi Government and the Independent High Electoral Commission in the development of processes for holding elections. The Security Council strongly endorses UNAMI's continued assistance to the Iraqi people and Government in preparation for the upcoming elections.
>
> "The Security Council congratulates departing Special Representative of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura on his strong leadership of UNAMI, and expresses deep gratitude to all the United Nations staff in Iraq for their courageous and tireless efforts."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2009/17.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.